



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Chippewa National Forest  
Supervisor's Office

200 Ash Avenue NW  
Cass Lake, MN 56633-3089  
Phone: 218-335-8600  
Fax: 218-335-8637  
TTY: 218-335-8632

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Dear Interested Party,

The Chippewa National Forest is seeking your comments and input on the proposed Blowdown Restoration Project. In response to the damage caused by July 2, 2012 windstorm, the Forest has identified a number of activities that include salvaging wood products, reducing hazardous fuels, applying prescribed fire, regenerating sites, and maintaining areas of interest for Tribal uses.

We are interested in knowing your concerns with the proposed activities, as well as any other site specific information you may have that would assist us in our planning process. In the first part of this letter, you will find a description of the purpose and need, and summary of the activities for the proposed action. The attached maps provide additional detail on the locations of the proposed treatments.

Tables containing details on treatments on a stand by stand basis are available at the district and Supervisors offices. This information can also be found on our website at or electronically at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/land/chippewa>. Click on Land & Resources Management, Projects, and then scroll to "Blowdown Restoration Project".

Please submit comments on the Purpose and Need and Proposed Action to: Chippewa National Forest, 200 Ash Ave. NW, Cass Lake, MN 56633 Attn: Sharon Klinkhammer, Team Leader, or telephone (218) 335-8660 or [sklinkhammer@fs.fed.us](mailto:sklinkhammer@fs.fed.us). Include your name, address, telephone number, and the concerns or specific information you have on the Blowdown Restoration Project. Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be available for public inspection. To be most helpful to us, we would appreciate your response by December 14, 2012.

Also included is additional information on the storm damage area and a summary of work the Forest has accomplished thus far. There is no need to comment on this information.

## **Blowdown Restoration Project**

### **Purpose and Need, Proposed Action**

As you may be aware, the July storm impacted a corridor approximately 10 miles by 40 miles wide parallel to Hwy 2 that extended from Bemidji to Grand Rapids and went through the heart of the Chippewa National Forest. This project resulted after a more comprehensive look across the storm damaged area.



This project covers activities to be included in an Environmental Assessment. By the time the NEPA process is completed and a decision is made, implementation would not occur until mid-summer or later, 2013.

The overarching goal of this project is one of ecological restoration that moves the stands and landscape towards desired conditions and objectives specified in the Forest Plan (FP). The Forest Plan recognizes the role of natural disturbance but also acknowledges the need to salvage and to treat both timber suitable and unsuitable lands to achieve desired conditions or resource objectives.

The Purpose and Need is identified in bold statements. Activities identified to achieve the purpose and need follow each statement and make up the proposed action. In addition, consideration was also given to minimize effects on Threatened, Endangered, and sensitive species, to minimize impacts on patches, to meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and direction for Management Areas.

**A. Restore conditions more representative of native vegetation communities, natural processes, and productive Forests.**

- Maintain conifer stands, structural and species diversity. (FP, O-VG-2, D-VG-3, O-VG-7, O-VG-9; pp. 2-21 and 2-22). Red and white pine stands may regenerate to aspen or hardwoods if not treated.
  - 2162 acres of existing red, jack, and white pine stands would be harvested and regenerated to conifer
  - 332 acres of aspen would be converted to conifer
  - Total of 746 acres of conversion are planned.

<b>Converted to:</b>	<b>Acres of Conversion</b>
Jack pine	349
Red Pine	21
White pine	218
Tamarack	140
Birch	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>746</b>

- Remove blowdown as necessary in order to regenerate stands to a productive timber condition consistent with Management Area direction (FP, D-VG-4, p. 2-21; G-TM-1, p. 2-19). Merchantable trees would be salvaged; un-merchantable stands would be mechanically treated. Site preparation, planting and/or seeding, natural regeneration, and timber stand improvement activities would be needed to promptly regenerate damaged stands to a productive condition.
  - 6591 acres of mechanical site prep for planting or natural regeneration
    - 3201 acres for planting
    - 3390 acres for natural regeneration

- planting, natural regeneration, and timber stands improvement activities
  - 3447 acres of planting/seeding
- Restore sites historically jack pine to jack pine, where feasible, through the application of harvest, prescribed fire or mechanical site preparation, and reforestation activities (FP, O-VG-2 and O-VG-7; p. 2-22).
  - 349 acres red pine or aspen sites converted to jack pine where appropriate.
  - Create larger blocks of jack pine through conversion and regeneration
    - 5 blocks created ranging in size from 53-651 acres

<b>Jack Pine Block</b>	<b>Acres of Block</b>	<b>Acres of Conversion to Jack Pine to create larger block</b>
1	165	60
2	116	29
3	651	42
4	53	53
5	68	59

- Restore fire to the landscape aggregating stands to create larger burning units (FP, O-VG-11, p. 2-23; D-ID-5, p. 2-18). Multiple burns may occur during a 10 year timeframe.
  - Size and acres in landscape burning units:

<b>Burn Unit</b>	<b>Acres</b>
BD-1	212
BD-2	144
BD-3	463
<b>Total</b>	<b>819</b>

- Reduce the potential for bark beetle population increases within down and damaged trees that may “spill over” and kill trees in adjacent lands by removing down and damaged trees. (FP, D-ID-1; O-ID-1 p. 2-18)
  - 1954 acres of damaged red and jack pine harvested

**B. Reduce Hazardous Fuels** (FP, D-ID-1, D-ID-4, O-ID-1, O-ID-3, O-ID-4, p. 2-18).

- Reduce the potential for destructive fires that pose a risk to life and property adjacent to residential areas and along transportation corridors. Reduce fuels to facilitate the regeneration of stands and reduce the risk of catastrophic fire.
  - 6336 acres of prescribed burning or mechanical treatments (includes landscape burns) to reduce fuels

- BD-4 (Burn Unit 4) is an aggregate of stands totaling about 352 acres
  - 3622 acres of piling and burning or other mechanical treatments
- Reduce the fuel loadings and fire hazards adjacent to and within the Pike Bay Experimental Forest. (This proposal is expected to be modified based on input from Research and comments from the public.)
  - 5 burning blocks
  - 120 foot fuels break (about 350 acres) along roads created through salvage or mechanical treatments
  - Multiple burn treatments may be required during a 10 year period
  - Burns would occur in the autumn months over a several day period when fuel moistures typically increase and recreational activities decrease. Public access would be limited. Smoke may linger in the mornings but westerly winds typically dissipate it.

**Pike Bay Experimental Forest (EF) Burn Units**

<b>Burn Unit</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Acres in EF</b>
PB-1	566	555
PB-2	926	633
PB-3	354	78
PB-4	600	380
PB-5	1650	1562
<b>Total</b>	<b>4096</b>	<b>3208</b>

**C. Salvage wood products and provide for commercial wood for mills in support of the local and regional economy (FP, O-TM-1, G-TM-1, p. 2-19).**

- Salvage down and damaged wood that is marketable. This includes stands with trees that are damaged but still standing, bowing/tipping trees, or trees with “sprung” roots. Some damaged stands warrant regeneration which would entail harvest of green trees in order to adequately regenerate the site to the appropriate species.
  - 7326 acres of harvest
    - 5060 acres of clearcut/coppice harvest
    - 2235 acres of selection harvest
    - 31 acres of commercial thinning

**D. Manage treatments in areas of interest to maintain or enhance traditional Tribal and community uses (FP, S-TR-3, O-TR-4, P. 2-36; and O-SE-1, p. 2-35).**

- Of particular interest are activities within the Ten Section area.
  - 1013 acres of harvest
    - 303 of coppice/clearcut harvest
    - 710 acres of selection
  - 1531 acres of fuels treatments
    - 967 acres of prescribed burning

- 564 acres of pile and burning or mechanical treatments
- 11 acres of aspen converted to jack pine
- Acres of landscape burning

<b>Burn Unit</b>	<b>Burn Unit Acres</b>	<b>Acres in Ten Section</b>
BD-3	463	103
PB-2	926	43
PB-3	354	276
PB-4	600	219
<b>Total</b>		<b>641</b>

## Other information of interest

### Project Area

Total acres within this corridor are about 308, 935 of which 68,439 acres is water and 240,494 is land.

<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Project Area (Total)	308,935	
Land	240,494	
National Forest	135,537	56
State	70,653	29
County	5,850	2
Other ownerships	28,454	12

Of the 240,494 acres, approximately 56% is National Forest lands, 29% State, 2% County, and the remaining 12% is in other ownerships.

Early estimates were that approximately 43,000 acres on the Forest was identified as being moderately or severely damaged. This number was based on a coarse scale analysis that identified areas with 75% or more damage. This number has been replaced by better figures from a finer scale analysis using aerial photography. Using this photography, the Forest categorized forested stands on the National Forest based on the level of detectable damage: 0-20%; 20-40%; 40-60%; 60-80%; and 80-100%. Extent of damage on non-National Forest lands was not determined or available.

<b>Detectable Damage</b>	<b>Storm Damage Class</b>	<b>Acres</b>
0-20%	1	74,184
20-40%	2	14,815
40-60%	3	10,517
60-80%	4	6,846
80-100%	5	2,154

<b>Total</b>		<b>108,516</b>
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Based on this approach, 19,515 acres have 40% or more of the stand blown down or damaged. This does not include non-forested stands which explains the differences between 135,537 acres of National Forest land on the first table and the 108,566 on this table. Stands that are bowed/tipped were not readily identifiable on the photos so generally are not included in the above numbers. This classification, coupled with limited field verification, became the basis for determining stands most appropriate to treat.

### **Past Decisions**

Past decisions include stands that are currently in a Timber Sale Contract or in recent decisions on EAs that have not yet been sold.

- a. Timber Sale Contracts – There are 17 Timber Sales within the storm damage area. Of these, 7 were considered to have catastrophic damage and 10 have minor storm damage. Agreements with purchasers on all 7 sales with catastrophic damage have resulted in contract modifications for salvage of down and damaged trees. Contract provisions allow for such modifications.
- b. Recent decisions were made for the Pine Thin and Lower East Winnie EAs. Reviews concluded that treatments in damaged stands were consistent with treatments proposed in the EAs and within the range of effects disclosed and did not warrant a supplement to or modification of the project decision.

### **Recent Decisions--Categorical exclusions and Decision Memos**

After the storm, the forest identified several priorities that guided our actions. First and foremost was safety of our public, followed by opportunities to salvage merchantable trees, and finally needed restoration activities. Safety and salvage activities were achieved through the use of categorical exclusions. Categorical exclusions simplify documentation and analysis for simple, small scale and focused projects where there are no significant cumulative effects.

1. Safety – focus was on removing down and hazard trees around facilities, along high use roads, trails, and recreation sites. Two decisions were made. The first decision, signed August 6, 2012, provided for removing and decking trees. The second decision provided for merchantable timber that was decked or removed to be sold. The decision was signed on September 10, 2012.

Since then, there have been two contracts to clear approximately 36 miles of road within the storm damaged area. Of these 19 miles has been completed. There is additional road clearing that could be done if funding were available. Other contracts have resulted in trees being removed in Norway Beach and South Pike Bay Campgrounds, Birches picnic area, around numerous recreation residences, and along the Migizi Trail, a high use area.

2. Salvage of merchantable timber -- The Forest plans to remove and sell merchantable blowdown and damaged trees considered to be salvage material. Areas identified generally

focus on pockets of the heaviest concentrations of down and damaged trees (at least 40% of stand had blowdown). Priority was given to stands with a significant pine and aspen component. These are the species that have the highest potential for marketability right now and pine is the greatest concern for pine bark beetles.

Purpose and Need included:

- Reduce fuel loads in an effort to reduce fire hazard and increase public safety.
- Reduce the amount of pine available for pine bark beetle habitat and ward off beetle infestations that would cause additional mortality of pine
- Capture timber volume that resulted from the storm.

Decisions are or will be documented in 15 Decision Memos that allow for *salvage of dead and dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than 1/2 mile of temporary road construction*. Site preparation and regeneration of some sites is included. There is an estimated 3300 acres of salvage activity proposed. Revenues received would help to pay for some of the fuels reduction and reforestation activities that could be accomplished through timber sales. Comments were solicited. Contracts for ten of the Decision Memos should be awarded by the end of November 2012.

### **Damaged, untreated stands**

Not all damaged stands will be treated in the efforts currently underway. Highest priority stands to be treated were those in damage class 3, 4, and 5. There are an estimated 88,520 acres with less than 40% damage of which at least 85,000 acres are projected to be untreated.

The Forest Plan identifies retaining an adequate representation of naturally disturbed forest that is not salvaged across the landscape. The Forest Plan states “Retain an adequate representation of naturally disturbed forest that is not salvaged, such as burned, flooded, blowdown, or insect or disease killed areas” (D-VG-5, p. 2-21; O-VG-12, p. 2-23). This direction allows for reserving a portion of natural events on the landscape. Standing dead and dying and higher levels of down woody debris are desirable and consistent with this direction.

Should you have any questions, feel free to contact Sharon Klinkhammer, Team Leader, at telephone (218) 335-8660 or [sklinkhammer@fs.fed.us](mailto:sklinkhammer@fs.fed.us).

Thank you for your interest in the Chippewa National Forest.

Sincerely,

/s/ Carolyn P. Upton  
CAROLYN P. UPTON  
District Ranger